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A N
E X P L A N A T I O N

O F S O M E
S C R I P T U R E S

“ HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD.”

I N A N
E I G H T H L E T T E R

To them that SEEK PEACE with God.

By T H O M A S B E N T L E Y.

F I R S T H E A D.

AMONGST David's last words is the charge which he gave to Solomon concerning Joab and Shimei. Now I have heard this spoken of by a very eminent preacher, as the worst and wickedest action that ever David was guilty of: but in so judging David upon that account, he condemned the righteous. We are to remember, that David as king was chief judge and magistrate in Israel, and as such it behoved him to be a terror to evil doers,—to smite the scorner, that others might beware,—not to bear the sword in vain, but faithfully to execute the judgments which God had commanded. Joab was a murderer, and the punishment of such we find, *Exod. xxi. 12.* and *Lev. xxiv. 17, 21.* Of the severity of God's judgment against Shimei's crime
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of sedition and rebellion, we have an instance in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and also a command against it, Exod. xxii. 28. and it is plain from Abishai's words (2 Sam. xix. 21) that that crime was then punished with death. Now as to David's not punishing these transgressors at the times they committed the crimes, I answer, that it is the duty of God's people to be wise as serpents, as well as harmless as doves: at the times when Joab murdered Abner and Amasa, and also when Shimei made his submission, David's kingdom was unsettled, and he testified at one time, that Joab and his family were too hard or mighty for him, 2 Sam. iii. 39. David promised Shimei that he should not be put to death for that crime, neither was he. As to Joab, I do not read that he made him any promise of forbearance whatsoever.

The Lord God Almighty grant that my last end may be like David's.

S E C O N D H E A D.

In the last days (saith God) I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and both man and woman shall prophecy, or preach, Acts ii. 17, 18.

Nevertheless, neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord, 1 Cor. xi. 12.

In Christ there is neither male nor female, for both sexes are one (alike or equal) in him. Gal. iii. 28.

Every Woman that prayeth or preacheth with her head uncovered, dishonoureth her head, 1 Cor. xi. 5.

Quench not the Spirit.—Despise not prophecyings, Paul.

In the times of the outward Mosaic dispensation, God committed his laws and judgments, and the ministry

ministry of holy things, to the tribe of Levi, and to the males of that family; but in the above prophecy of Joel he tells us, that he would consecrate to his service, not only the sons of Levi, but both males and females of every nation. And by the "last days" and "last times," we are not to understand merely the outward times, which have been since our Lord Jesus Christ's appearance in the flesh, but they are to be spiritually understood; and accordingly we find women preaching and teaching throughout the old as well as the new testament. Sarah, Gen. xxi. 10. Rebecca, Gen. xxvii. Rachel and Leah, Gen. xxxi. Miriam, Deborah, Naomi, Ruth, Hannah, Abigail, the woman of Abel, 2 Sam. xx. Huldah, 2 Kings xxii. 15. Lemuel's mother, Prov. xxxi. Isaiah's Wife, Isa. viii. 3. and in the new testament, Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, the woman of Sychar, Philip's daughters, Priscilla, also those mentioned, Phil. iv. 3. &c. As it is very plain therefore from the precepts and examples both of the Old and New Testament, that holy women may lawfully teach or preach, it is also plain that the words "women" and "woman," in 1 Cor. xiv. 34. and 1 Tim. ii. 12. are either to be spiritually understood as "widows," 1 Tim. v. and "nobles," Eccles. x. 17. and "women," Isa. iii. 16—24. or else that Paul there forbids women to intermeddle with the civil or worldly government of the church or house: but I am persuaded of the former, and that by "women" is there meant them who have been bred up, or brought by parents, husbands, wives, &c. into an outward form of godliness (such as dress, attendance at church or meeting, &c. 1 Cor. vii. 14) but have not the power of it: for we know that the church of God is not an outward house or building, but

the body of Christ, of which every true christian is a part, 1 Cor. vi. and therefore whoever instructs or teaches or commands any true christian in any place, speaks and teaches in the church of God.

T H I R D H E A D.

I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, 1 Tim. ii. 1.

I suppose this scripture is the principal one which is brought to support the custom of constant prayers before preaching; but they who use it for that purpose are ignorant of its meaning. Scripture is certainly a good interpreter of itself, and there is no doubt but that our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles lived according to that which they taught; but I do not find that ever our Lord or his apostles began their Sermons with prayers: and so far from praying for prosperity or the blessing of God upon every man, we find both in the Old and New Testament commands and intimations against it, Numb. xvi. 15. 1 Sam. xxviii. 16. Psalm lxxxiii. Isa. ii. 9. Jer. vii. 11. and xiv. chap. Ezek. xx. 3. Matt. xii. 31. Mark iii. 29. Luke xii. 13. John xvii. 9. Acts v. 1—9. and viii. 20. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. Gal. vi. 16. 2 Tim. iv. 14. Heb. x. 26. and xiii. 18. 1 John v. 16. 2 John 10.

In 1 Tim. v. 4. Paul commands, that when any one joined in fellowship or communion with the church, before they gave their substance to their spiritual brethren, that if they had natural parents, or benefactors who were in want ("widows") they should first requite them: the words "first of all,"
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in this head, I understand in a somewhat similar sense: that is, as all mankind are naturally alike sinners and aliens from God, therefore when first called we are the brethren of the world; and so long as God is pleased to let us remain (Gal. iv. 1.) and struggle under that unequal yoke, and in the school of the law, it is our duty to behave as brethren to them who are not our brethren, not having that groaning, willing Spirit which we have. But it is not the will of God that we should stay long in this state "of the breaking forth of children;" and if we patiently, faithfully, and conscientiously continue in well doing, he will certainly bring us from under this unequal yoke, into a large and free place; and teach us to "discern and make a difference betwixt the precious and the vile, the righteous and the wicked; him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." "Henceforth, says Paul, know we no man after the flesh." And says our Lord, "Who is my mother or my brethren?"—It is also the duty of christians, so long as they are in this world, to pray for and do good unto all men according to their power, by encouraging and rewarding virtue, and by discountenancing vice; by contributing to the support of justice, quietness, peace and order.

F O U R T H H E A D.

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth up against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. Lo, this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, Isa. liv. 17.

I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and will save thy children, Isaiah.

Sing

Sing ye, a vineyard of red wine: I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. Isaiah.

I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never (so long as the world lasts, neither through force nor cunning, be made to) hold their peace, Isa. lxii. 6.

If I do not the works of God, believe me not.—the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. Christ. And the same of the prophets and apostles throughout the scriptures.

If ye were blind, ye would not be guilty. Christ.

Where no law is, sin is not imputed.—The times of (unavoidable) ignorance God winketh at.—If there be first a willing mind, what a man can do is accepted.—Hold fast the form of sound words.—I believe all things that are written in the law and the prophets.—Let my adversaries shew a life and deeds like mine. Paul.

Having lately been in company with some professors who speak great swelling words, pretending to be wise above that which is written, and take upon them to despise, and blot out, and alter the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles and prophets, because they do not understand them, or do not like them; I have for the comfort of the upright, humble, honest soul, selected as above some of the scriptures which promise God's protection to the truth, both spoken and written; and his acceptance of our obedience, according to that which we do know, or can reasonably and conscientiously learn.

Though the Spirit of the living Almighty God is undoubtedly infinitely preferable to the dead letter of scripture, yet my own experience witnesses, that he teaches nothing contrary to what is revealed in

all the books of the New Testament, and throughout all the eminent parts of the old : not that I pretend yet to understand every part of God's written word, but he hath already taught me much of it ; and from what I have already learnt of it, my experience convinces me, that it is indeed the truth, John iv. 29. Indeed I reject the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and those called Apocrypha, as rules of faith or obedience, having found some things in them contrary to, or manifesting an ignorance of the other undoubtedly authentick scriptures, and also no where quoted or mentioned either by our Lord or his apostles.— So often as the scriptures have been translated by different hands, and so exposed as they are to be cavilled at and sifted, it is not reasonable to suppose that there is any material error in the translation ; and we ought to be exceedingly careful in expunging or altering them, especially in those books which are well witnessed and authenticated. And let us rejoice, my brethren, that it is not a wrong transcription, or translation, which can prevent our pleasing God ; who is satisfied with a willing upright heart, and with that obedience which is in our power. Search the scriptures, my brethren, and hold fast that written word and testimony : yea, earnestly contend for it ; for if the foundations be taken away, what shall the righteous do ?

F I F T H H E A D.

*Behold the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth,
much more the wicked and the sinner, Prov. xi. 31.
Jer. xxv. 29.*

I beheld

I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light, &c. Jer. iv. 23—26. also xxxvii. 7. and xlvi. 10. Joel ii. 1—11. Zeph. i. 14—18.

For the time is come (1700 years ago) that judgment must begin at the house of God, 1 Pet. iv. 17. 2 Pet. iii. 12.

The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, the stars shall fall from heaven.—The Son of man shall come, &c.—Verily, I say unto you, this generation (which is passed or gone 1600 years ago) shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled, Matt. xxiv. 29—35. Mark xiii. 24—31. Luke xxi. 25—32.

These texts teach us that the last judgment is spiritual, and passes upon us before we leave this world and depart from the body. And we find that the expression of the apostle, “It is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death the judgment,” is spiritual also: the death of the righteous being a death to the world, and to sin; and the death of the wicked, a death to God, a drawing back from his ways and service.

S I X T H H E A D.

Man that is in honour (great or learned) and understandeth not (forsaketh not all known wilful sin, Job xxviii. 28. Psalm cxi. 10. Prov. ix 10) *is like the beasts that perish,* Psalm xlix. 12, 20.

For he remembered they were but flesh; a wind (breath, life) that passeth away, and cometh not again, Psalm lxxviii. 39.

As the beast dieth, so dieth the (carnal) man; yea, they have both one breath, so that a (natural) man hath no pre-eminence above a beast; they both go unto one place; both of them are dust, and turn to dust again, Eccles. iii. 19, 20.

All (mere) flesh is grass. Surely the people is grass, Isa. xl. 6, 7. 1 Pet. i. 24.

From these, and other such like scriptures, we learn, what is the end and future state of the carnal man; viz. a return to dust, and total extinction of being.—Yet are the wicked turned into hell (according to their deserts), and all the people that forget (forsake) God. I myself, as David and Jonah also testify before me, have been in that situation: and therefore knowing by experience what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the avenging living God, who can cast both body and soul into hell; and also being graciously drawn to run without ceasing for the glorious, happy, eternal prize set before God's persevering children in the scriptures, I say, for these reasons, I persuade men to forsake sin, and to follow that which is good.

S E V E N T H H E A D.

Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? Christ.

Doth not even nature teach you?—Use sound speech which cannot be condemned. Paul.

The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend (companion, lover) of the world (the wicked) is the enemy of God, James iv. 4.

No lie is of the truth.

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The custom which is used by very many serious people, of giving the appellation of "friend," both to their friends, to them they know not, and even to their known unjust enemies, is not good. When our Lord called Judas "friend," his wickedness was not yet outwardly manifested to him, and therefore he did not judge him publicly; but I am persuaded that he would never have called him friend after that time, if an opportunity had offered, except Judas had sincerely repented. Remember, my brethren, that God's children ought to use a pure language, and great plainness of speech, and to avoid all appearance of evil.

E I G H T H H E A D.

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more, Isa. ii. 4. Mic. iv. 3.

Put up thy sword into the sheath, Matt. xxvi. 52. John xviii. 11.

For the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them, Luke ix. 56.

My kingdom is not of this world, John xviii. 36. James iv. 1.

Let every soul be subject to (that is, not resist, James v. 6.) the earthly government under which they dwell: for these powers (whether good or evil, Prov. xxviii. 2. Isa. iii. 4. and xviii. 4. Ezek. xx. 25.) are appointed by God. If thou do good, the government (whether good or bad in itself) shall produce good to thee (whether it protect or persecute thee), Rom. xiii. 1-4. Tit. iii. 1. 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. and iii. 13, 14.

From

From these scriptures, my brethren, and also from the whole tenor of the gospel, we learn that christians may neither take up arms to gain that which belongeth to another, nor on any account to fight against the earthly government under which they dwell: they may flee from persecution if God so allow, and teach them in their consciences to do, Matt. x. 23. John vii. 1. 2 Cor. xi. 33. Luke ix. 24, 51. John x. 11, 11. Acts xxi. 13. but if they resist by arms, or fight against these ordinances, they fight against God, 1 Sam. xxvi. 9—11. Isa. liii. 7. Lam. iii, 27—30. and if they are his people, shall surely receive punishment for so doing. Wherefore, my brethren, keep yourselves from these things, and as much as possible from all tumults and riots, Tit. i. 6.

N I N T H H E A D.

I will henceforth sacrifice to none but the Lord. Only in this thing the Lord pardon me, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon, to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon; when I (in thus serving my master) bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And Elisha said unto him, go in peace, 2 Kings v. 18, 19.

I have heard a preacher bring this speech of Naaman's as a proof of his double-mindedness and insincerity; but that charge is unjust.—When God told the Israelites by Moses, that if they broke his laws he would cast them into bondage and servitude among their enemies; he added, “and there shall they serve other gods, wood and stone,” Deut. xxviii. 67.

agreeable to which are the commands, Eph. vi. 5. Col. iii. 22. 1 Tim. vi. 1. Tit. ii. 9. 1 Pet. ii. 18. which does not mean that servants are to murder, or lie, or steal, or get drunk, or cheat, or game, to please their masters; but if they are apprentices, or bond-servants, or in debt, or in want of the absolute necessities of life, or have spiritual brethren so destitute, whom they cannot otherwise relieve; I say, in such cases, if their masters set them about useless, idle, and therefore idolatrous work, such as is many parts of the sculpturing, painting, carving, and other businesses, they are to obey in such things until their time is out, or their debts paid, or their master or creditors release them, or they can provide for themselves better.

Naaman did not, I am persuaded, mean to call upon, or adore, or worship any image, but when the king, his master, went to see or study some useless work or science, of which Rimmon was the author or teacher; I suppose then it was Naaman's duty to go with him, and minister unto, or serve him in some idle, foolish employment.

I have said something concerning this subject in my third letter.

T E N T H H E A D.

And it came to pass as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount, Exod. xxxii. 19.

Surely oppression (great provocation) maketh a wise man mad (sometimes do foolishly). Eccles. vii. 7.

There is no man that sinneth not, 1 Kings viii. 46. 2 Chron. vi. 36. Psalm xix. 12. Eccles. vii. 20.

And

And the contention was so sharp betwixt Paul and Barnabas that they departed asunder, Acts xv. 39.

I withstood Peter to the face (after the day of Pentecost) because he was to be blamed, Gal. ii. 11.

If we (apostles) say (even now) that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, 1 John i. 8.

In many things (of ignorance and infirmity) we all offend, James iii. 2.

Charity (love in deeds to the brethren, good men) shall cover (cancel, discharge, blot out, procure pardon for) the multitude of (such our) sins, 1 Pet. iv. 8.

As it is true that wilful sin, and he that commits it is of the devil (1 John iii. 8.), so it is also true, that the upright or perfect children of God do often err, or sin, through ignorance, infirmity, or inadvertency. For "all unrighteousness (fault, error) is sin," 1 John v. 17. Yea, even "the thought of foolishness is sin," Prov. xxiv. 9. And who is strictly circumspect and wise at all times?

E L E V E N T H H E A D.

Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven, Matt. xviii. 18. John xx. 23.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not here confer any gift upon the apostles exclusive of the rest of God's children: but the meaning is, that God heareth and answereth the prayers of all them that obey him; and as they judge and ask according to his will (1 John v. 14.) therefore if they be oppressed or

or injured and cry unto him, he avengeth them, Exod. xxii. 22—27. Numb. xvi. 15. 1 Cor. v. 5. and he also heareth them in behalf of one another, and of them that do them good, Gen. xxx. 27. 2 Kings iv. 13. Mark ix. 41. 2 Tim. i. 16. James v. 15. 1 Pet. iii. 12.

T W E L F T H H E A D.

Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them, Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

This text teaches us, that if any of God's children ask for any thing according to the meaning of any of the promises which are given them by the prophets and apostles, they shall surely receive it: for whosoever walks according to the rules given by them (being so gathered unto them indeed), or in other words, whose conversation is such as becometh the gospel of Christ, that person is a temple of the Holy Ghost (1 John ii. 29. and iii. 24. Ezek. xxxvi. 27.) and therefore a member of the same body with them; in which body Christ dwells and reigns, until the end come, that all his enemies are subdued, and that he shall have delivered up the sovereignty to God even the Father: that God may be all in all, 1 Cor. xv.

T H I R T E E N T H H E A D.

Is any of you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with

oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick.—the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, James v.

By “anointing with oil,” is meant the giving to our brethren (according to God’s command, and our ability) whatever is needful either for the soul or body: but to make our fervent prayer effectual, it is necessary that there be obedience also in the person prayed for. We find that our Lord Jesus Christ himself could do nothing great without this, Mark vi. 5, 6. Matt. ix. 29. and xv. 23. Mark ix. 23. If God hath not first opened the heart, and turned it to obey him, praying for a blessing is in vain, Ezek. xiv. 13—20. Luke viii. 15. and xvi. 31.

By opening and turning the heart to obedience, I do not mean that all inclination after sin is to be gone, and the old man totally destroyed before we can pray for the spiritual blessing of peace and joy; but I mean that we are to obey in all things according to our knowledge and ability, whether it please our inclination or not, Isa. lviii. 13, 14. Mark ix. 43—47. Deut. xxx. 1—6.

It is indeed a doctrine of devils, to say that we are not to do good except our hearts be free to, or take pleasure in it. “Be not weary in (leave not off, Psalm) well-doing; for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not (draw not back).”

F O U R T E E N T H H E A D.

Being faithful, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy

enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward, Heb. xi. 24.

Wherefore, seeing so many faithful witnesses to the truth are before us, let us lay aside every weight, and (especially) whatsoever sin it is that most easily lays hold on us; and let us enduringly and patiently run the race (of hardness, affliction, reproach and shame) which is set before us (in the scriptures): looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God, Heb. xii. 1, 2.

Do not imagine, my brethren, that you can enjoy both the sweet things of this world, and of that which is to come:—the lusts (desires, pleatings) of the flesh (natural inclinations) must be subdued and killed by all who enter into the kingdom of God; which beginneth in this life. Therefore set the cost before you, and keep it in view, that it may be a means of strengthening and encouraging you (Luke xxi. 13). For if you give God that obedience of your actions which he requires, you will certainly be made partaker of the cross (sufferings) of Christ, Matt. x. 25.

F I F T E E N T H H E A D.

The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.—All meats are lawful for me, but all are not expedient. Paul.

Though

Tho' the gospel does not with-hold from the children of God any food that is good for the body; yet so far as the living according to our circumstances, and according as the state of our body requires, so far, I say, meat and drink is of the kingdom of God; and the abuse of it is of the kingdom of the devil. If I will eat the fat and drink the sweet, when my conscience convinces me that the poverty of my circumstances, the wants of my brethren, the lusts of the flesh, or the health of my body, require me to use coarse and plain food; I say, if I will cast off conscience and reason in the use of my food, God will surely cast me out of his kingdom: and if, on the contrary, I do "put a knife to my throat," when there is need, and mortify (kill) the lusts and lovings of my palate and appetite, I say, so far, and for this cause, God is well pleased with me.

S I X T E E N T H H E A D.

All power is given unto me (as a reward of my obedience, and a proof that I have well done the work which God gave me to do, John xvi. 10. and xvii. 4, 5. 1 Cor. xv. 27. Phil. ii. 6—9. Heb. i. 8, 9.) *in heaven and in earth* (for a time, 1 Cor. xv. 24—28. Heb. i. 13); *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them* (1 Pet. iii. 21.) *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, Matt. xxviii. 18, 19.

This text, my brethren, do't mean that the one God of Abraham and his faithful children, is composed of three distinct, almighty, co-equal, self-existent beings or persons, according to that dark unscriptural, blasphemous doctrine, called, the doctrine of the Trinity; but by "the name of the Father," we understand the word which God spake throughout the Old Testament by the prophets; Heb. i. 1. by "the name of the Son," is meant the word or commands which he gave us by our Lord Jesus Christ; John iii. 22. and viii. 28, 42, 47. and xii. 44—50 and xiv. 24. and xv. x. Heb. i. 2. and v. 5. and by "the name of the Holy Ghost," I understand the word spoken unto us by the apostles; Matt. x. 20. Mark xiii. 11. Luke x. 16. Heb. ii. 3, 4.

"To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom (are given) all thing

(mercies, redemption, sanctification, glory) and we (become God's children) by (obedience to) him," 1 Cor. viii. 6. Gal. iii. 26, 27. Heb. vii. 5. Col. i. 20. —God, and the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit of God, are only different names of one and the self-same Being (John iv. 24. 2 Cor. iii. 17), and our Lord Jesus Christ is the first-born (or begotten, or created or made) of all his works, Col. i. 15. who in the fulness of time which God had before appointed, took upon himself a body of flesh; and to whom it pleased God to give the possession or enjoyment of himself, in a manner and degree above that which he hath given to any other creature (Phil. ii. 9, 10. Col. i. 16—19. John iii. 34) because "he did always the things that pleased him."

S E V E N T E E N T H H E A D.

If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross daily and follow me. Christ.

I am crucified with Christ. Paul.

God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, whereby I am crucified to the world, and the world unto me.—We preach Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.—The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.—we are killed (crucified) all the day long.—I bear in my body the marks (of the sufferings) of the Lord Jesus.—The suffering life of Christ is manifest in my life.—Fill up the measure of his sufferings for his body's sake the church. Paul.

To preach the cross of Christ, my brethren, is not to tell people to trust solely in what he did and suffered when he was in a body of flesh upon earth, but it is to teach them to live in that self-denied, holy, righteous, God-fearing, God-loving manner that he did; which life will certainly bring a cross (persecution, trouble, sorrow, distress) upon the lover of it; and which self-denying, holy, humble, lowly, shameful, suffering, patient, world-forfaking life is foolishness or madness in the sight of the prophane, and a thing which most even of the greatest professors stumble at, and turn away from; but we who possess it and follow it, know it to be the almighty power and wisdom of God; and that out of it there is no power to overcome our spiritual enemies, EIGHT-

L E T T E R V I I I . 19
E I G H T E E N T H H E A D .

*Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples, John iv. 2.
I thank God that I baptized none of you.—For Christ
sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel, 1 Cor.*
i. 17.

*There is (but) one (true, right, holy, saving) baptism
(which is spiritual). Eph. iv. 5.*

*(Christian) baptism is not the putting away the filth of
the flesh (outward washing, or sprinkling, or dipping),
but the answer of a good conscience towards God (by being
risen with Christ, or cleansed by the Spirit of God).
1 Pet. iii. 21.*

No doubt the faithful children of God ought to
lay aside the carnal, outward ordinance commonly
called baptism, which is an idol. If any say, that
our Lord permitted baptism (he being “a minister
of the circumcision”) and that the apostles practised
it; we know also that our Lord was circumcised,
and that Paul used that carnal ordinance (for the
sake of weak minds) to Timothy, but afterwards he
laid it aside, and rejected it.

N I N E T E E N T H H E A D .

*Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.
—We use great plainness of speech.—Keep the ordinances
as I delivered them to you. Paul.*

*Is any merry? let him sing psalms (rejoicing, thank-
giving scriptures, or breathings of the spirit of God,
as Ilsa. xii. and xxv. and xxvi. not the laboured,
rhyming, musical compositions of men). James v.
13. (But) let no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion
to fall in his brother's way, Rom. xiv. 13.*

In a former letter I mentioned to you to be very
careful in singing, to use plain and true versions of
the scriptures; but upon well considering that mat-
ter, I find the custom of singing, as it is commonly
used in public churches and meetings at this time,
to be productive of, and liable to so many evils, that
I am persuaded it ought to be intirely laid aside by
every faithful Christian. How few are there in any
congregation or meeting, whose knowledge and ex-
perience in general, and whose present frame of mind
or situation in particular, is the same? and one part
of

of which ought not to pray, when the other may have cause to sing. —My brethren, lay aside every weight, and make straight paths for your feet.

T W E N T I E T H H E A D.

And Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise and serve God, who hath heard and preserved me: and they did so:—And the terror of God was upon their enemies, Gen. xxxv. ii. 5.

When God for iniquity doth rebuke man, he maketh his (outward) beauty to consume away like a moth. Psalm.

When the Lord enters into judgment with his people, he will take away their fashionable, ornamental, fine, expensive cloathing, Isa. iii. 18—23.

Let our men and women be holy:—cloathed in modest, humble, sober, cheap apparel, 1 Tim. ii. 8, 9. 1 Pet. iii. 3.

Shine as lights in the world:—and shew yourselves examples and patterns of goodness, and humility, and holiness in all things.

Though I have mentioned this matter of dress in a former letter, yet when I see the expensiveness, uselessness, vanity, and idolatry which is amongst even them that profess an extraordinary degree of knowledge and devotedness to God, and set themselves up to be teachers in his spiritual Israel, I cannot close this letter without telling them, that their conduct, in this respect, is utterly opposite to the will of God: whose holy Spirit is grieved with these their expensive, useless, unloving manners. For so much of our substance as we bestow upon needless or superfluous things, so much of our poor brethrens right do we fraudulently and violently deprive them of; and so much finery or luxury as we unnecessarily set before their eyes, so far do we endeavour to deprive them of humility and contentment; and also at the same time we cast ourselves into the devil's net, Psalm x. 9.

Whosoever will be teachers of, or eminent among christians, let them be servants, bodily and spiritual, to God's People; not in word and in tongue only, but in manual deed, and in truth.

The blessing of God be with all such forever. Amen.

London, June, 1776.

